

Documents on Diplomacy: Exercises

Reactions to a "New Beginning"

THE GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL

The government of Israel expresses its hope that President Obama's important speech will indeed lead to a new era of reconciliation between the Arab and Muslim world and Israel. We share the hope of President Obama that the American effort will signal a new era that will bring an end to the conflict and a pan-Arab recognition of Israel as the Jewish state living in security and peace in the Middle East.

Israel is committed to peace and will do its utmost to expand the circle of peace while taking into consideration its national interests, security first and foremost.

JOHN BOEHNER, HOUSE REPUBLICAN MINORITY LEADER

He seemed to place equal blame on the Israelis and the Palestinians. . . I have concerns about that because Hamas is a terrorist organization that has been funded by the Syrians and the Iranians. Where he continues to say he will sit down with the Iranians without any preconditions, I just think that that puts us in a position where America looks weak in the eyes of their rulers.

AMR MOUSSA, HEAD OF THE ARAB LEAGUE

I feel that the speech was balanced and offered a new vision of rapprochement regarding relations with Islamic states. [His speech shows that the US] will deal with the region's issues with a sense of balance. This includes the Palestinian question, the end to Israeli settlements, Palestinian rights, which must be respected.

SPOKESMAN FOR PALESTINIAN PRESIDENT MAHMOUD ABBAS

The part of Obama's speech regarding the Palestinian issue is an important step under new beginnings. It shows there is a new and different American policy toward the Palestinian issue.

AYMAN TAHA, A HAMAS SPOKESMAN IN THE GAZA STRIP

Speaking about a policy of pursuing a war against extremism and working towards two states for peoples on Palestinian lands is no different from the policy of his predecessor, George W. Bush.

SPOKESMAN FOR THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT

The speech was historic and important and reflects a positive direction for the new administration [in Washington] and it is a new start. The use of Koranic sayings plays a big part in a positive change of picture but there is a necessity for action.

The government of Iraq is comfortable with the clarity of the president in respecting commitments to Iraq and the timetable for withdrawal stipulated in the security pact. I think there is clear support of a right for a Palestinian state, and their right for a life, but Arabs are waiting for pressure to be exerted on Israel so it can stop its violations in Gaza and the West Bank.

SPOKESMAN FOR THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

The Secretary-General [Ban Ki-moon] believes that President Obama's speech is a crucial step in bridging divides and promoting intercultural understanding, which is a major objective of the United Nations. His message reaffirms our shared commitment to practise tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours.

HASSAN FADLALLAH, LAWMAKER FOR LEBANON'S HEZBOLLAH

The Islamic world does not need moral or political sermons. It needs a fundamental change in American policy beginning from a halt to complete support for Israeli aggression on the region, especially on Lebanese and Palestinians, to an American withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan and a stop to its interference in the affairs of Islamic countries. We have not seen any change in US policy towards the Palestinian cause.

SHEIKH ABDULAHİ SHEIKH ABU YUSUF, MODERATE SOMALI ISLAMIST GROUP AHLU SUNNA WALJAMACA

Obama's speech is good and Islam means peace. Obama, let's follow the verses you quoted from the Koran. Al-Qaeda has misinterpreted Islam and turned out to be the enemy of all mankind.

Islam says let all nations live peacefully and may the chaotic ones be punished. Islam does not order anyone to destroy mosques and churches. Westerners, al-Qaeda is a bomb you planted - let's remove it together.

"Westerners, al-Qaeda is a bomb you planted—let's remove it together."

MOHAMMAD MARANDI, HEAD OF NORTH AMERICAN STUDIES AT TEHRAN UNIVERSITY

With regard to Iran, the tone is significantly more positive than before, compared to the previous US administration, though still in some aspects negative. But I think Iranians alongside the people of the region expect the same change that Obama was promising to the American people, for American policies in the Middle East region as well. America has to change. Talking is not enough. As long as racism and apartheid continue to exist in Palestine there will be no peace in the region.

JAVIER SOLANA, EUROPEAN UNION FOREIGN POLICY CHIEF

It was a remarkable speech, a speech which will certainly open a new page in relations with the Arab-Muslim world and, I hope, in the problems we have in numerous parts of the region.

ERIC GOLDSTEIN, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

I think on human rights there were many things that were commendable... but it is disappointing that when he talked about democracy in the Muslim world he wasn't more specific about some of the problems.

I don't expect that he would single out Egypt as the host country, but he might have mentioned, for example, a state of emergency that has been in effect for 30 years. And not just in Egypt but in other countries. He could have mentioned the imprisonment of dissidents.

COMMENTARY ON (US BROADCASTER) FOX NEWS

The mention of terror group Hamas as a leader of Palestinians has some wondering just how far President Obama is going to change US policy toward the Mideast. In an apparent policy shift, President Obama on Thursday invited Hamas—a designated terror organization—to “play a role” in the future of the Palestinian people. During his speech to the Muslim world in Cairo on Thursday, the US president bluntly recognized the group, which has called for the destruction of Israel. . .

RANDA ACHMAWI, DIPLOMATIC EDITOR FOR EGYPT'S AL-AHRAM HEBDO NEWSPAPER

America for the first time is adopting a very wise strategy in acknowledging the other and that was clear in every word chosen by President Obama. In this context, where we see an Israeli government who is refusing even the least principles of the two-state solution, he made clear the American vision. . . There is nothing innovative.

AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI, OF IRAN

“The nations of this part of the world. . . deeply hate America because during many years they have seen violence, military interference, rights violations, discrimination. . . from America.

“Even if they give sweet and beautiful talks to the Muslim nation. . . that will not create a change.” —Reuters

EGYPTIAN STUDENT INGY HASSIEB

“I understand that he couldn’t portray his host country’s government in a negative light, but it’s no secret that Egypt is very much authoritarian and not democratic.” —The New York Times

PAKISTANI POLITICAL ANALYST SIRAJ WAHAB

“Whatever wounds America has inflicted on the world, they are very deep and they cannot be erased away by only one speech. Overall the speech was positive, but let’s see whether it was merely good words or could we ever see these words be practiced.” —Associated Press

SHEIKH MOHAMED IBRAHIM BILAL, SOMALI INSURGENT MOVEMENT, AL SHABAAB

“Obama’s speech is useless unless he stops his political interference with Somalia and the Muslim world.”

“If he means what he says, let him withdraw his troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. Stop supporting AMISOM (AU peacekeeping force in Somalia) and the Somalia government.” —Reuters

RESPONSE FROM: _____

RESPONSE FROM: _____